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MY ESCAPE IN 1837.

BY THOMAS STORROW BROWN.

One brigade of troops under Col. Gore had been driven back from St. Denis; another under Col. Wetherall had fallen back from St. Charles to Montreal; and a third under Col. Gore, directed against St. Denis, had reached St. Ours, nine miles distant. Doctor Wolfred Nelson saw that, there being no rising elsewhere, we were drawing the whole force of Government to our district; and that, though we might maintain ourselves in force, still we must retreat, and draw the troops after us, whereby there might be much useless sacrifice of life and property. The armed men were therefore directed to disperse quietly to their homes for the present, and be in readiness to assemble at the first signal. For our two selves a free pardon had, by a communication intercepted by us, addressed to the Rev. Mr. Demers, curé of St. Denis, been offered to all others on condition of our being delivered into the hands of the Government, and we felt no ambition to become a vicarious sacrifice for the political sins of the Richelieu district. We also rightly imagined that the representative of Royalty in Quebec might, in his desire for a nearer view of two individuals who had caused so much disquiet, offer a price for our heads that would render them a marketable commodity. From these considerations we determined on retiring to the States.

On Friday, the first of December, about thirty agreed to meet at dark at a farmhouse, about a mile in the rear; but at the hour only seven appeared,—Nelson, myself, Dr. Kimber (of Chambly), Captain Jalbert, Rodolphe Desrivières, Simeon Marchessault, and Doctor Duchesnois (if there was another

I have forgotten his name). Duchesnois, on horseback, went safely through by the way of Stanstead. The rest started in three carts, but had not got far when one of the horses (the same that threw me at St. Charles) overturned Jalbert and his companion into the ditch, broke the cart, and galloped back, leaving two carts for six passengers.

Passing through St. Cesaire, about daylight, we were pushing on towards the Townships, when a man on the road informed us we were rushing into "*Le gueule du Loup*" (the wolf's jaws), as guards were stationed on the road to intercept gentlemen moving on our especial business, and that it would be necessary for us to go through the woods, with the passes of which he was acquainted.

Returning to St. Cesaire, we were furnished with a glorious breakfast by the miller; and crossing to the woods, on the right or north side of the Yamaska river, we continued walking until nightfall, when we found ourselves in a tremendous "wind-fall,"—the fallen trees crossed in every direction, through which we forced ourselves, like small fish through a salmon-net, till we arrived at a swamp, when darkness brought us to a stop. The proximity of some cabins in a clearing prevented our making a fire. To compensate for the loss of sleep during the last forty-eight hours, I had the consolation of getting my back against a tree, with my knees drawn up to keep my feet out of the water, which agreeable position was disturbed about midnight by a violent rain, that continued till morning.

At daylight our march was resumed. The outer world was fair and beautiful, but in the forest, the constant dripping of big, half-congealed drops from the branches, was like a shower-bath from an ice-house. This forest was not like an upland wood where you move among majestic trees, and tread upon dry leaves; but a level, where the cold soil throws the roots of the trees to the surface, to be overthrown by every wind, in every direction, while small brushwood grows up in every little opening thus created. Your course is a continued climbing over, or creeping under, fallen logs, or *swimming* through a quick-set hedge of brushwood, with the expedition of a fly through a saucer of honey. Underneath, the ground is spongy, leaving water in every footstep. One half the surface was covered with little pools, which, being slightly frozen over, kept one in constant terror between hope and alternate changes of joy or sorrow, as his feet sank or remained firm upon the treacherous surface. Onward we pushed; and at night, choosing a dry spot, we kindled a fire, collected hemlock branches for our beds, dried our clothes, and passed the night. For food we had found through the day a few small turnips, which the owner appeared to have left on the field for the gleaners after the precept of the Levitical law. For drink, the swamp-pools furnished abundance, that we drank after the fashion of animals,—bending down to it.

On Monday, early, we reached the skirt of the wood, when, to our horror, our guide, a little in advance, came running back, saying we were close upon a village, where he saw armed men. Like Natty Bumppo, he had lost his way in the "clearings." Retracing our steps about a mile, we came to a rapid on the north branch of the Yamaska river, where Nelson, who was of Kentuckian frame, dashed into the water; and, fording across, called us to follow. By comparing the water line on his body with a section of corresponding height upon our own, we saw that the experiment with ourselves would approach too nearly to the submarine, and, therefore, listened to our

guide's suggestion, that there was a better crossing lower down.

By moving to this place we became separated from Nelson, whom we saw not again; and on reaching it our guide, upon pretence of looking a little further, got out of sight, and deserted us for ever. My companions, tired of wandering in the woods, determined on returning to the French settlements, while I insisted on proceeding to the States. Roused by the barking of a dog, we found ourselves towards evening close to a log-house, in a small clearing. I insisted upon going to it, instead of making another of those everlasting turns in the woods, to avoid it,—such as we had practised for the last three days. My companions remonstrated,—the dog barked louder,—they hurried back into the forest, and I towards the house, and found myself alone. Nelson, after wandering about for a week, was captured in the woods near Waterloo. The others, after secreting themselves in some houses near where West Farnham now is, set out again for the States, and were captured near the lines. It was Monday night, and, except a few raw potatoes and turnips,—we had had no eatables since Saturday morning.

Before leaving St. Denis, I had, in addition to old bruises, lamed one of my feet. The fall from my horse at St. Charles having nearly broken a rib, my side was much inflamed; and my companions, perhaps, did not regret separating from a slow traveller. On approaching the cabin, I found the only inmate was an Irishwoman. Her husband was, she said, away; though I suspected that having seen our armed party, he was hid under some neighboring log. She had nothing to eat but potatoes, which she charitably offered to boil; but, as she mentioned there was a "Yar-kee" living a mile lower down, declining her proffered hospitality, I proceeded by a beaten path to his "clearing." On approaching the house, how grateful to my ears was the Yankee voice of the wife scolding her children! On entering the log-dwelling, which was one room, without a chimney,

but with a tremendous pile of wood burning upon a hearth, from which the smoke escaped through a hole in the roof, I asked for some bread and milk. The woman, eyeing me suspiciously, "guessed" she had none,—“the children had eat it all up.” I had, however, hardly felt the grateful influence of the blazing fire, when a bowl of milk with bread was placed beside me, and at the same moment the frying-pan was hissing on the fire, with fresh pork. Oh, woman! whether in the city palace, or the log-hut of a lone forest “clearing,” in spite of your vagaries, how universally does the spontaneous impulse of compassion gild your character, wherever or whenever distress makes its appeal! Only imagine your adoration of a being, though shoeless, who, with an intuitive perception of your wants, provides you a dinner of hot pork chops, with a dessert of bread and milk, after three days’ fasting!

The husband soon arrived, dark and suspicious, like one who had his own reasons for privacy in the forest, and was doubtful of the object of intruders. I professed no knowledge of Canadian affairs, but spoke knowingly of swamp-lands and pine timber, as if I was “prospecting” for saw-logs. He was incredulous; but said each could be true to the other. There were nine children in the family. A little girl remarked there were “plenty of children, but nothing to put on them.” In summer, the absence of neighbors to make uncharitable remarks, made clothing of less consequence; and in winter they could stay in the house. The squatter was, however, industrious, and may have since had a good farm. The big boys in the evening split long shingles for covering a barn, and the father shaved them. One room, with the garret, served for the dwelling and lodging of all. I slept in a bunk, among the smaller children, who knotted up like a nest of eels, quite oblivious to any impropriety of lying heads and points. The woman would take no pay, but said, when I insisted on her accepting two dollars, “I do want a pair of shoes.”

On Tuesday morning, after a hearty breakfast, I crossed the north branch of the Yamaska in a canoe. Three miles walk in the woods brought me to the south branch, up which I walked, until I found another canoe in a clearing, and I was ferried over by a Canadian woman. Proceeding until three o’clock, I reached a clear, cultivated country; and, laying down in a point of woods, slept till dark. My lameness had become extremely painful, but I hobbled along a road leading south. That was always my course,—easily followed in the woods, as the moss is on the north side of trees, and the tendency of the limbs is to the south. This was as plain as guide-boards, and I have always wondered how people can “wander,” or get lost in the woods.—Arrived at a bridge,—I think the place was Cowansville,—I waited for a man approaching to come up, and inquired the way to Dunham. He directed me to cross. Forgetful of my lameness, I did cross, and walked briskly for more than a mile, over the rough frozen ground, when I sank exhausted. There were buildings at the bridge, lighted up, and hence my diligence in passing them. I was afterwards told that a guard kept there had gone in to warm. Again walking on, fatigue at midnight compelled me to resort to a couch in the top of an old fallen hemlock tree, where the scraggy, hard branches afforded so little shelter, that I awoke at daylight fairly stiff with cold. Following the road a short distance, at the sight of farm-houses, from the chimneys of which white smoke was issuing high into the cold air, I struck into the woods, thinking to strike a road leading to Stanbridge, where I had friends. Coming to a log-house, I asked the way to Dunham (which I wished to avoid). “Why, there,” said the man; and, sure enough, it was on my left, apparently not half a mile distant. Again, I pushed back into the woods. The man went soon to the village, and, I was afterwards informed, was told he would have made his fortune had he stopped me.

For four hours I trudged in the woods,

turned one way by coming to openings, and another by the noise of wood-choppers, or ox drivers, and emerged for food to a house that appeared isolated, where I found that in the whole time I had only gained about fifty rods in direct distance. One of my legs having become useless, my supporters had performed the action of a pair of dividers,—one leg standing still, while the other walked round it. Rested and refreshed, I continued my route till near dark, when I passed through a clearing,—the place of future farms, with five log-houses. Inquiring at the last one for a wood-road leading towards Stanbridge, I again entered the forest, fired my carbine as if I was looking for game, and sunk exhausted. The leg that had been dragged all day, not only refused to be dragged any longer, but the other, which had so patiently endured the toil, refused to drag it. With such mutinous members, and a snow-storm commencing, the greatest of all dangers was remaining thus unsheltered for the night, and I turned back to the first house, determined to risk it with the best story I could devise. As I approached, I met the owner, to whom I said, quite unconcerned :

"I was going through the woods to Truax Mills, but it looks so much like a snow-storm, that I would like to get lodgings in your house."

He looked an instant in my face, and exclaimed :

"Brown ! I know you ; but here you have four friends, and are safe. I have just come from the 'Flat' (Dunham village). You were seen this morning. There is ten thousand dollars offered, and they are all after you. Old Captain Smith was fixing his old gun. I told the old cuss it wouldn't go off ; but he swore he'd shoot you if he see'd you. I daren't take you into my house."

All this was hurriedly uttered, almost in one breath, as he dragged me hastily by the shoulder to his barn.

A council of the four friends was called on the barn-floor. They could devise no means of escape except walking immediately across the fields or woods, ten miles, to

the lines. This I modestly informed them was impracticable, unless they provided for me a new pair of legs. A thick quilt, and a good supper were brought, and I remained two nights and one day in a hole, burrowed far into the hay mow. What a contrast with my previous night's lodging on the snow, under an old hemlock top,—I don't forget what a scraggy one it was,—how few the branches, and how few the leaves ! Young hemlock furnishes capital bedding. I never enjoyed any bed-room like that nest in the hay. The swelling of my limbs diminished rapidly.

Let those who speak of "low" people, and "lower classes," think of the high honor and high mindedness of these four poor but independent men, perfect strangers, not one of whom I had ever seen or heard of before. The two thousand dollars really offered for my apprehension would have paid off the arrears on all their land, and left them a surplus ; but not one entertained the thought, while hundreds, higher up in the world's catalogue, would have sold me like a dog, not for "loyalty," but for the gain,—to be wasted in frivolities.

But luxuries must have their end. The furnishing of food necessarily caused the secret of my hiding-place to be known to the women of the house, who, finding it too weighty, called on others to help them keep it. I moved for one day to another barn. My friend said it was dangerous to stop longer. He had heard a man say he would bet twenty-five cents that I was in one of the barns of that neighborhood. My boots were greased, a thick pair of stockings provided, a good supper eaten, and with a young man for guide, I set out on Friday evening, the 8th of December, to finish my journey to the States.

By the roads it was ten miles to the lines, but supposing they were guarded, we passed through the fields and woods. The snow was some inches deep ; and, through weakness, I was obliged to rest frequently. Great precaution was necessary as we approached the lines, my guide going frequently ahead to inquire our whereabouts,

at farm-houses, whose inmates were rather gruff at the rude awakening. About daylight we reached Chaffey's, the first house in Berkshire, Vermont, about one hundred rods outside of Canada, which I entered with the first feeling of security I had known for some time. I was now free. Hardly was I seated when my host brought a Montreal newspaper, and, pointing to a proclamation offering two thousand dollars reward for my apprehension, inquired if I was the man? I told him I was, and that the information might have been valuable, had he found me a few minutes earlier,—a few hundred yards farther north.

The last nine days had been long, but I cannot say they were unpleasant, for there is cheerfulness under any circumstances, if one is buoyed up with hope and determination.

NOTE.—In my last communication I named Mr. "Charland," priest of St. Benoit. It should have been written "Chartier."

Original.

QUESTIONS.

BY NORMAN BRONTE, ESQ.

A perfect winter night! How peacefully Rests on the rounded bosom of the snow,
The pale and coldly sympathizing moon,
Which, like a fair and loyal waiting slave,
Devotes her beauty to set forth the Queen,
And breaks her splendor into gems to deck
The wealthy veil which wreathes the royal Earth.

So muse I, wand'ring lone along the road
That runs by Melbourne's clustered cottages,
More lonely here than in the growling wild,
When coming tempests fret the chafing trees,
Whose marshalled infantry awaits the trump
Of battle; while the feathered, hill-born pines,
On picket duty on the windward brow,
Croon coronachs and snuff the coming war.
For here, 'neath every roof there struggles forth,
Through curtains closely drawn, that cheery ray
Which says, "This is a home—not thine. Here dwell

"A love-bound family of thine own sort,
"Who know thee not; here hearts beat time
with thine;
"Here thoughts that rust with thee, find voice
and answer,

"Both meet and kind; here, too, perchance,
abide

"Behind which jealous curtain who can tell?

"Ears unto which thy tuneless voice were
music;

"Eyes that would tune thy joyous thought to
song;

"Lips that would fill thy soul with melody;—

"And yet thou art without and these within."

The curling smoke hath also words for me,

Which, like an airy spirit, bears to heaven

The incense of the love which warms the home.

The eaves of graceful curve, the trellised bower

I would myself have made, all speak to me

Impassioned words that make my breast to
heave,

Which tingle through my veins with deeper flow

Than when Craignesh's wild artillery

Breaks and hurls back the charge of Ocean's
waves,

And all his serried ranks of pine howl triumph

As louder speaks the touch of one we love,

Than words of patriot or man of God;

As louder than His earthquake or His whirl-
wind,

Elijah heard the still small voice of God.

Yea, all these well-disposed trees and shrubs,

With every branch up-pointing to a star,

And downward to the place man chose for them

And all the harmonies with which the moon

Doth play, and which her wand calls into life,

Tell me these unknown people are my kin,

And bid me love them with a brother's love.

What is it thus shuts out the joy of love?

To-day I called upon a former friend,

Who had a child, that she would have me see.

I had been proud myself to show those cheeks,

Those bright black searching eyes, though
none of mine.

I looked upon the baby in her cot,

And loved her; and she, gazing in my face,

Began to cry. *What made the baby cry?*

And now I sit within the homeward car,

Alone amid a crowd of mine own people,

Whose every face is for the most like mine,

Though each one bears his several mark of sin,

And every mind thinks thoughts like those in
me,

Some wiser in this thing and some in that,

None but hath some rich goods to inter-
change;—

Why speak I nought to them, they nought to me?